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AMCONSUL CHENNAI  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000601

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA DETAINS AND EXPELS CANADIAN SHADOW  
FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Sri Lankan immigration authorities, apparently acting on instructions from the Defense Secretary, detained Canadian Liberal Party Member of Parliament for Toronto Bob Rae on arrival late on June 9. (Rae's constituency has a large Tamil minority.) Rae had previously requested and received a visa for a private visit; he was seeking to visit IDP camps and meet senior Sri Lankan officials. The Defense Secretary characterized Rae as an "LTTE sympathizer." The Foreign Secretary said that Rae's statements in the Canadian Parliament on Sri Lanka were "unacceptable" and accused him of attending fundraisers at which the LTTE flag was displayed (Rae denies that charge). Despite repeated interventions by the Canadian High Commissioner with senior Sri Lankan officials, the GSL refused Rae entry unless he signed a statement essentially disavowing his earlier positions on Sri Lanka's crisis. Rae refused to do so, and departed on June 10 on a flight to London. The incident does not augur well for bilateral relations or development cooperation between Sri Lanka and Canada. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Bob Rae, Liberal Party Member of the Canadian Parliament and the foreign affairs "critic" (shadow minister) for his party, was detained on arrival in Colombo's international airport shortly before midnight on June 9. He was not permitted to enter the country, despite having been issued a visa for his private visit. Rae represents central Toronto, an electoral district with a large number of Tamil constituents. Rae has been outspoken in calling for the Canadian government to take a more active role in settling the conflict in Sri Lanka. In an op-ed piece in the Toronto Star in February he criticized both the LTTE and the GSL for the suffering they were causing to civilians. He had visited country several times previously and maintains contacts with a wide range of Sri Lankans.

¶3. (C) According to Canadian High Commission staff, the purpose of the visit was to assess conditions in the IDP camps and gain a firsthand understanding of the current situation on the ground. Meetings were requested with Senior Presidential Adviser Basil Rajapaksa, Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe and Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona. Foreign Ministry informed the High Commission that since Rae was not coming on an official visit, they could not secure these appointments, but the High

Commission could try to arrange them directly. Permission to visit Manik Farm was requested and, on June 10, denied.

¶4. (C) Canadian High Commission staff who met Rae on arrival contacted Foreign Ministry officials late last night and asked for them to intervene with the Controller of Immigration who was denying him entry to the country. The Canadian Deputy High Commissioner told Charge that Bogollagama undertook to do so. Rae was detained through the night by security officials in the business class lounge of Sri Lankan Airlines, accompanied by High Commission staff.

¶5. (C) On the morning of June 10, Canadian High Commissioner Angela Bogdan contacted Charge to request cell phone numbers for Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa and other officials, which he provided. Rajapaksa did not take Bogdan's call, but responded to her text message as follows: "I know his background. He is an LTTE sympathizer. I have read his speeches. We are not going to allow him into the country."

¶6. (C) Foreign Secretary Kohona told High Commissioner Bogdan on June 10 that Rae was not being allowed into the country because of "unacceptable" statements in Parliament and because he had attended LTTE fundraisers at which LTTE flags were displayed. (Comment: Rae flatly denied the latter charge.) Bogdan reported to Charge that Kohona offered on the morning of June 10 to strike a bargain whereby if Rae would sign a statement he would be allowed into the country. The statement, paraphrased, read: "The statements attributed to me on the situation in Sri Lanka were made without full awareness of the ground situation, which I regret. My visit is intended to build bridges and strengthen bilateral relations. This is a private visit and will not be used for political purposes." Rae refused to sign the statement, and departed on a flight to London early afternoon June 10.

¶7. (C) Comment: The refusal to allow Rae, even though he had been issued a visa for this visit, to enter the country is indicative of the current course of the government in silencing dissenting voices. The decision represents a lost opportunity for the GSL to explain its perspective and sends a highly negative message to the Canada's large Tamil Diaspora. Coming just two weeks after police allowed protesters to demonstrate in front of and cause limited physical damage to the High Commission, despite advance requests from the High Commission to keep the protesters at a reasonable distance from their building, the incident does not augur well, at least in the short-term, for cooperation between the two governments in meeting Sri Lanka's pressing humanitarian needs.

MOORE